

# Locked Out Crystal Workers Head Back To Work

The Associated Press

MOORHEAD, Minn. (AP) — Union members will soon head back to work at American Crystal Sugar plants in Minnesota, Iowa and North Dakota, but they say the sting of a 20-month lockout will make their return difficult both for them and the company.

A slight majority of union members voted to [accept the company's contract offer](#) [1] over the weekend after rejecting the same terms [four times before](#) [2].

They should be back on the job in about six weeks. When they return, they will be working alongside the employees who replaced them during the lockout. American Crystal says about half, or at least 650, of the union workers retired or quit during the lockout.

Dennis Gerlach changed his vote and was among the 55 percent who voted yes on the contract Saturday. Gerlach, 56, worked for 35 years at the Moorhead factory before the lockout, which forced him to take another job for less money. He told Minnesota Public Radio (<http://bit.ly/YWPRF9> [3] ) that he's happy to be going back to work but doesn't have the same trust in company leaders who he said spent months planning to lock out their employees.

"I think they have to actually do more time and planning than that to build relations among everybody again," Gerlach said. "I really wonder if they're qualified and if they're going to do that. But we'll see."

Gayle Lund, 52, said she will return to work because she needs health insurance. But she is frustrated. She voted no on the contract for a fifth time because the company refused to negotiate, and she said she expects the workplace to be different, with tension between union members and replacements.

"And with a lot of different people. People who have been doing my job," Lund said. "And that burns a little. I think it's going to be a big mess for a while."

American Crystal Sugar Vice President Brian Ingulsrud said integrating returning union workers and replacement workers will be a challenge. The company will expect all of the workers to treat each other with respect, he added.

"I think the good thing is that we have a very good relationship with our current workforce, the replacement employees, and they're going to make up a very large percentage of our workforce going forward," he said.

Last year's sugar beet harvest will be processed and the factories will have closed for the summer by the time union workers return, Ingulsrud said, so they will have a few months to integrate the workforce.

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The company will hold employee meetings over the next two weeks to determine how many union members want to return to work. Returning union employees will receive a total pay increase of 13 percent over the four-year contract.

Nearly 1,300 members of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International union were locked out on Aug. 1, 2011, after rejecting the cooperative's proposed contract.

American Crystal is a Moorhead-based cooperative owned by about 2,800 sugar beet growers. It's the nation's largest sugar beet processor.

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### **Links:**

[1] <http://www.impomag.com/news/2013/04/american-crystal-sugar-workers-approve-contract>

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